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House Energy and Commerce Committee Passes Landmark Bill That Includes Matsui Priorities

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (D-Sacramento) secured multiple priorities for the people of Sacramento in the landmark health care legislation passed today by the House Energy and Commerce Committee on which she serves. The Energy and Commerce Committee is the final House committee with jurisdiction to have voted in favor of the America's Affordable Health Choices Act, which is expected to go to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in September. Congresswoman Matsui celebrated the inclusion of critical public health and prevention priorities she has continued to champion in Congress, and will create a more efficient, more effective health care system for all Americans.

"America's Affordable Health Choices Act incorporates key initiatives I have fought for — initiatives that will restore the vitality of our public health workforce and to increase our focus on preventive health care services," said Rep. Matsui. "The inclusion of significant portions of my Public Health Workforce Investment Act, H.R. 2810, and the Wellness Trust Act, H.R. 1940, in the underlying legislation is indicative of the historic commitment made by this Congress to repair our public and preventive health system. Investing in preventive health care is vital to helping Americans access the care they need to stay healthy, reduce their health care costs and ease the burden on our over-crowded emergency rooms."

This landmark health care reform act takes major steps to fix the health care system for millions of Americans who are either struggling to afford skyrocketing health care costs, uninsured, or risk being dropped from their current coverage because of pre-existing conditions. Rep. Matsui's Public Health Workforce Corps legislation addresses the growing crisis in public health by providing up to \$50 million a year in scholarships and loan repayments for graduates of public health schools and programs for both full-time and part-time students who are often working to pay their way through school. This will enormously help the public health students in Sacramento, and students and aspiring students across the country.

Congresswoman Matsui also called for the creation of a Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund. While 78 percent of the health care dollars in the United States are spent on chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension, only 3 percent of health spending in the country is focused on proven interventions to prevent these diseases from occurring in the first place. Her provision would reverse this imbalance by creating a dedicated Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund to finance proven and community-based preventive health care services for all Americans. The Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund ensures that Congresswoman Matsui's vision of a stronger focus on preventive health services is incorporated into every American's health care routine.

Additionally, Congresswoman Matsui had four amendments adopted in Committee mark-up:

ADULT DAY HEALTH CARE

Allows adult day health care centers to operate under Medicaid state plans, instead of being forced to move to Medicaid waivers, which are more onerous for adult day health centers and make it harder to cover beneficiaries. It will ensure that adult day health centers across California do not close their doors for good, as they are currently threatened with having to do if they are forced to run themselves under a waiver system. The waiver system presents a series of problems for the adult day care programs — administrative costs, burdensome paperwork, and the fact that it would only allow one "population" at a time — meaning care providers would have to choose between the mentally ill, elderly or disabled.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTERS

Creates a new definition of a Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Center (FQBHC) in federal law that will expand the definition to include mental health centers, with the goal of making FQBHCS eligible for federal funding. Currently, community-based mental health programs help about 6 million adults, children, and families conquer mental illness and substance abuse disorders to lead productive lives. In Sacramento, the County-operated mental health center recently stopped accepting new patients. With this new Federal definition in place, the Sacramento center — in addition to centers across the country — finally will have a baseline off of which they can start re-building the community-based mental health system, and help millions of people with mental illness or substance abuse disorders across the country.

MEDICAID FUNDING PRESERVATION FOR CALIFORNIA

Allows California to continue assessing a provider fee, which the state uses to raise additional dollars for the Medicaid program. This legislation will save California from having an estimated \$480 million cut out of its Medicaid program.

PREVENTION COORDINATION

Strengthens the coordination between the Community Preventive Services Task Force and the Clinical Preventive Services Task Force, both of which are included in the underlying bill. Also requires reports on the preventive services workforce, and on underlying prevention needs across the country. While clinical and community services are often thought of separately, they produce superior outcomes when they work together. In addition, Rep. Matsui's amendment requires the National Prevention Strategy to review payment incentives and preventive care delivery capacity, to ensure that we maximize the investment in prevention that this bill represents. Ultimately it will make the preventive care system outlined in the comprehensive health care legislation work more effectively.

"We cannot wait any longer to address our broken health care system—there are too many children to care for, too many seniors without prescriptions, and too many families deciding between paying their mortgage or paying their medical bills for us to wait one more day," Congresswoman Matsui said. "Today's passage of the comprehensive health care legislation is a historic step in the right direction. As a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, I am proud to have helped put forth a concrete solution to this economic and moral crisis."

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